

VZCZCXRO9380
OO RUEHAG RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHNEH RUEHRN RUEHROV RUEHSL RUEHSR
DE RUEHC #2641/01 2472339
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O P 042321Z SEP 09
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHSW/AMEMBASSY BERN IMMEDIATE 6474
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA IMMEDIATE 5157
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO IMMEDIATE 5907
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI IMMEDIATE 6585
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO IMMEDIATE 8537
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA IMMEDIATE 6465
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO IMMEDIATE 0406
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA IMMEDIATE 8814
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS IMMEDIATE
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE 7592
INFO RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY 3125
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 0222
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 1594
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 3369
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 3495
RUEHKL/AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR PRIORITY 2591
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 1826
RUEHGP/AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE PRIORITY 1615
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN PRIORITY 1213
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 9723
RUEHNEH/AMCONSUL HYDERABAD PRIORITY 0094
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA PRIORITY 3380
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 2746
RUEHRN/USMISSION UN ROME PRIORITY 0714

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 STATE 092641

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/04/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [PTER](#) [MASS](#) [SOCI](#) [EAID](#) [EUN](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: PERSUADING THE GOVERNMENT OF SRI LANKA ON FREEDOM
OF MOVEMENT

Classified By: SCA A/S Robert O. Blake, Jr., reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) This is an action request. Please see paragraphs
8-11.

BACKGROUND: ADVOCATING FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

¶2. (SBU) Following the end of hostilities in May 2009, the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) moved over 270,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) into a series of camps -- the largest known as Manik Farm -- where conditions are crowded, unsafe, and unsanitary. IDPs have endured considerable stress, in large part because they have had little information about when they will be permitted to leave.

¶3. (SBU) The GSL is nowhere near meeting its goal of facilitating the return of 80 percent of IDPs by the end of 2009, despite pledges that it would return 75,000 IDPs by the end of August (replaced by a more recent pledge to release 100,000 "low-risk" IDPs by the end of September). Thus far, fewer than 12,000 have returned, and the Sri Lankan leadership has not released a detailed plan on how it intends to achieve large-scale returns. While camp conditions have improved, recent pre-monsoon rains caused serious flooding in Manik Farm, underscoring the inadequacy of these camps and the continued risk to IDP welfare, particularly during the monsoon season, which will begin in October.

¶4. (SBU) The GSL maintains that returns have proceeded slowly due to ongoing screening for Tamil Tiger (LTTE) combatants in the camps, the need for infrastructure (roads, electricity, schools, etc.) to be in place before IDPs can return, and the extensive demining required in the North. None of these arguments supports the slow pace of IDP registration and identification card issuance (a necessary precondition for return). They also do not explain the slow

pace of family reunification within the camps and the continued internment of low-risk IDPs, many of whom could stay with family and friends outside the camps. Indeed, the international donor community and NGOs increasingly view the camps as detention centers.

¶5. (C) Recognizing that an incremental, "benchmark" approach to IDP returns has not worked, the August 21 Interagency Policy Committee (IPC) meeting on Sri Lanka tasked the State Department to propose a strategy for persuading the GSL to allow full freedom of movement for IDPs, with a focus on government action by the end of September to avoid potentially life-threatening conditions in the camps during the monsoons. Although the GSL might not agree to open the camps fully by that time, advocating clearly the principle of freedom of movement could result in the GSL at least accelerating the rate of return of IDPs, and the pace both of IDP registration and ID card issuance.

STRATEGY

¶6. (C) In order to achieve the goal of freedom of movement, the State Department is undertaking the following actions:

- Demarche Colombo at the highest possible level, urging freedom of movement for IDPs, with a focus on government

STATE 00092641 002 OF 004

action by the end of September.

- Demarche key donor capitals (EU countries with GSL representation, Canada, Australia, India, Japan), the EU, and the UN, to urge them to push the GSL to allow for freedom of movement, with a focus on government action by the end of September.

- Convene donors in Colombo, conveying to GSL officials the importance of freedom of movement.

- Increase the frequency of high-level visits by donor country officials and the UN to press this issue; seek to coordinate such efforts through Colombo-based Missions.

- In particular, urge the Secretary General's chief of staff, Vijay Nambiar, to return to Sri Lanka. Consider whether a follow-up trip to Sri Lanka by Walter Kalin, the Secretary General's Special Representative for the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, would be useful in maintaining pressure on the government. Consider whether to form a contact group for Sri Lanka.

- Seek a dialogue with the Indian government about the situation in Sri Lanka and what each government might do to bring about progress.

¶7. (C) The U.S. would also consider additional assistance, contingent upon available funding (funding sources have not yet been identified), to help the GSL accelerate the rate of return and to promote freedom of movement. When and if funding is identified, we would indicate our willingness to assist the GSL provided that international organizations have access to areas of return and that beneficiaries play a role in the development of rehabilitation plans. We would encourage other donors to do the same. For example, the U.S. could consider and encourage:

- Providing additional funding to UNHCR to support the returns process to cover, for example, the cash grant for families returning home or to host families.

- Using food aid to assist the GSL to provide the six-month rations that families returning home or to host families receive.

- Fast-tracking funding to the International Organization for

Migration (IOM) to support IDP registration and ID card issuance.

-Supporting the purchase of flail machines or handheld equipment, which the GSL wants desperately to step up the pace of demining or consider providing USG funds to IOM or UNHCR to purchase this equipment.

ACTION REQUEST

18. (C) COLOMBO: Demarche senior GSL officials at the highest possible level. Please include the following points:

-Most IDPs have already spent over three months in camps since the end of combat operations.

-While considerable progress has been made on IDP registration and the issuance of national identification cards, the rate of return has been unacceptably slow.

-The number of IDPs still in detention is inconsistent with

STATE 00092641 003 OF 004

the GSL's own statements of intention.

-Recent pre-monsoon flooding in Manik Farm underscores the urgent need to allow all IDPs to leave the camps, if they desire, to join family or friends.

-Sri Lanka's policy of detention is inconsistent with the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and international practice. In short, it is simply unjust to keep hundreds of thousands of people confined for so long a period of time.

-We understand Sri Lanka's concerns about former LTTE combatants in the camps, but this concern does not explain why low-risk IDPs (children, the sick, elderly) have not been allowed to leave in greater numbers or why the pace of family reunification in the camps has been so slow; the screening for former LTTE has carried on too long.

-Likewise, the government, if concerned about the risk to IDPs from landmines, should restrict access to mined areas rather than detain people inside the camps.

-We strongly urge you to allow full freedom of movement for all IDPs by the end of September to avoid a humanitarian crisis during the monsoons.

-The U.S. is providing \$6.6 million in demining assistance to Sri Lanka. The GSL should fully utilize international NGO capacity to help it move ahead expeditiously on the demining effort by providing full access to the Vanni and by providing NGOs with more timely tasking requests.

-The U.S. would also consider additional assistance to help Sri Lanka accelerate the rate of return and to promote freedom of movement. We are willing to do so provided that international organizations have access to areas of return and that beneficiaries play a role in the development of rehabilitation plans. We would encourage other donors to do the same. For example, the U.S. could consider and encourage:

--Providing additional funding to UNHCR to support the returns process to cover, for example, the cash grant for families returning home or to host families.

--Using food aid to assist the GSL to provide the six-month rations that families returning home or to host families receive.

--Fast-tracking funding to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to support IDP registration and ID card issuance.

--Supporting the purchase of flail machines or handheld equipment for demining.

¶9. (C) ALL OTHER ACTION ADDRESSEES: Convey the above points to the highest appropriate host country and international organization (including Office of the UNSYG -- Vijay Nambiar and Walter Kalin, and UNHCR) officials and seek host country and international organization support for the strategy outlined in paragraph 6. Underscore the grave risk to IDP health and welfare if at least a majority of camp residents are not permitted to leave by the end of September, when the monsoon season begins. Stress the importance of sustained, high-level international engagement and coordinated action on Sri Lanka, noting, in particular, our proposal to convene donor country representatives in Colombo to convey a concerted message to the GSL on the importance of allowing

STATE 00092641 004 OF 004

freedom of movement.

¶10. (SBU) EU MEMBER STATE ADDRESSEES: Please deliver points as soon as possible in advance of September 14-15 GAERC discussions on Sri Lankan IDPs.

¶11. (U) Please report responses front-channel by September 11, 2009. Please send a copy of your cable by email and direct any questions to SCA/INSB Sri Lanka desk officer Anthony Renzulli, (202)647-1078.
CLINTON